DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 927 FL 007 026

AUTHOR Connors, Kathleen
TITLE The Subjunctive in Decline: The Case of French.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 28p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Context Clues; *Contrastive Linguistics; Descriptive Linguistics; English; *French; Grammar; Language Research; Language Universals; Linguistic Theory; Negative Forms (Language); *Semantics; Sentence Structure; *Syntax; *Verbs
IDENTIFIERS *Subjunctive

ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to be the first part of a study contrasting the subjunctive of French with that of English and comparing it in both languages with the syntactic devices that can replace it. It examines the syntactic constraints on the use of subjunctive forms in French, the semantic contrast between indicative and subjunctive forms, and the semantic changes caused by the replacement of the subjunctive. Three types of French predicates induce their complement verbs to take the subjunctive under certain conditions. In addition, relative clauses can exhibit a meaningful indicative-subjunctive distinction which is not lexically conditioned. The [plus/minus referential] contrast expressed by this opposition is quite similar to the "fact" or "affirmation" vs. "hypothesis" distinction that characterizes the complements of predicates allowing an indicative-subjunctive contrast. One can therefore conclude that the indicative-subjunctive meaning difference in complement clauses is generally [plus/minus real]. The last two sections discuss the ongoing loss of meaning in the French subjunctive and its replacement by other forms. Some predictions are made about the future course of the decline of the subjunctive in French. Certain meaning neutralizations and changes entailed in the replacement of the subjunctive by other syntactic devices are discussed here. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED109927

The subjunctive in decline: the case of French K. Connors-Pupier

This discussion is intended to be the beginning of a study contrasting the subjunctive in English and French and comparing it internally with the syntactic devices which alternate with it and replace it. It is concerned with the syntactic constraints on the use of subjunctive forms, the semantic features of the contrast between various indicative and subjunctive forms, and the semantic changes and neutralizations implicit in the replacement of the subjunctive.

1. Types of predicates governing the subjunctive:

As a point of departure for the aspects of subjunctive usage discussed here, I used Maurice Gross' Méthodes en syntaxe. But for a study of this sort, it is impossible to take the binary judgments recorded in that study at face value. There turn out to be narrow and idiosyncratic constraints on the use of subjunctive forms after many of the predicates labelled [+subjunctive] there. These include limitations on the tenses in which the verb may be followed by the subjunctive, the necessity of an impersonal subject or a (personal) dative accompanying certain verbs if they are to take a subjunctive complement. More interestingly, the verb may take the subjunctive in one of its meanings and not in another. But we will see that such apparently idiosyncratic semantic differences organize themselves along a restricted number of semantic dimensions and endow the subjunctive with some "meaning".

FL007026

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Gross' study organizes predicates taking the subjunctive in French into three categories. By far the largest class, which I shall call (A), takes the subjunctive in the complement in affirmative, negative, interrogative, and imperative sentences. A much smaller class, (B), includes those predicates which can take the subjunctive if the sentence is negative or interrogative. The third and even smaller class, (C), are verbs which can take the subjunctive in their imperative form. Again, various syntactic and semantic constraints limit the use of the subjunctive after individual verbs and verb classes. But aside from this, there are many differences among informants as to the acceptability of the subjunctive after particular predicates, whatever constraints are added to Gross' tripartite syntactic categorization. In addition, there are instances where an informant finds an indicative and a subjunctive equally acceptable after a given "subjunctive-taking" predicate, with no difference in meaning. Such instability provides synchronic evidence for the decline of the subjunctive in French.

The first class of subjunctive-taking predicates (A) is well known. From a semantic viewpoint, this syntactic class is heterogeneous. It contains both factive (e.g. _supporter_ {mal / bien}, _il est curieux que_, _regretter_) and non-factive (_attendre_, _craindre_, _désirer_) predicates. The term "factive" is due to Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1970). Among the non-factive verbs in this class, verbs of 'willing' have traditionally been regarded as typical of the subjunctive (e.g., _demander_, _insister_, _exiger_). It is interesting that in this respect, the French subjunctive is even more lexicalized than that in English. In the latter, all the predicates that can take the subjunctive are "non-factive".

As was mentioned above, the subjunctive is generally obligatory[1] in the complements of sentences containing Class (A) verbs in the matrix, whether they are affirmative, negative, interrogative, or imperative, as it is after certain subordinating conjunctions. Thus it is not a (redundant) signal of a syntactic sentence type. Neither is it a marker of a unified semantic verb class, as we have just seen, since both factive and non-factive verbs are in this class. But the vast majority of class (A) predicates are non-factive. This group is semantically more in keeping with what we shall find is the "meaning" of the subjunctive. Sentences (1) - (44) of annex (1) exemplify class (A) in typical contexts. Note that a number of these predicates require impersonal subjects, and that the impersonal subject is necessarily il or necessarily ça for certain verbs.

Class (B) predicates are, as we said, those which can take the subjunctive in negative and interrogative sentences but not in affirmative ones. Both factive verbs and non-factive verbs of "willing" are conspicuously absent from this class. Some verbs which appear to be in class (B) in that they sometimes take the indicative and sometimes the subjunctive are really in class (A) in one of their meanings, and otherwise take the indicative. This appears to be the case with insinuer and sous-entendre, which require the subjunctive in the sense of suggesting a course of action and the indicative in the sense of subtly making a claim:

(45) Il insinue / sous-entend que tu fasses le travail pour lui.

(46) Il insinue / sous-entend que tu es un escroc.

There also appear to be some verbs which are, again, in class (A) in the will-related sense of suggesting or requiring a course of action, and in class (B) in their "affirming" sense. Examples of this group are stipuler, spécifier, and préciser:

(47) Le contrat stipule / spécifie / précise que vous fassiez le travail.

(48a) Le rapport ne stipule / spécifie / précise pas que vous avez fait le travail.
(b) ayez

(49a) Le rapport stipule / spécifie / précise -t-il que vous avez fait le travail?
(b) ayez

Again for purposes of isolating the meanings of verbs which can fall into class (B), one must distinguish between the "perception" and the "judgment" sense of certain verbs: the sense of "perceiving", voir, percevoir, and sentir take the indicative:

(50a) Il ne voit / perçoit pas qu'il y a une tache sur la nappe.
(b) *ait

(51a) Il ne sent pas que son ami a peté.
(b) *ait

(52a) Voit / Perçoit-il qu'il y a une tache sur la nappe?
(b) *ait

(53a) Sent-il que son ami a peté?
(b) *ait

In the sense of judging, these verbs fall into class (B):

(54a) Il ne trouve / voit / perçoit / sent pas que vous avez raison.
(b) ayez

(55a) Trouves / Vois / Perçois / Sens-tu que j'ai raison?
(b) aie

Insofar as speakers make a meaning distinction, in sentences (48a), (49a), (54a), and (55a), the complement is treated as an affirmation, and in (48b), (49b), (54b), and (55b) as an hypothesis.

In the same vein, we must distinguish "affirming" from "reporting". For some speakers, verbs meaning "to report" something do not take the subjunctive at all. These would include transmettre, diffuser, rapporter, réciter, raconter and perhaps informer:

(56a) Je n'ai informé personne que tu as fait ça.
(b) ?aies

(57a) Je ne raconte pas que tu fais ça.
récite (b) *fasses
rapporte
transmets
diffuse

So when the verb dire means "report", it takes only the indicative:

(58a) Je ne dis pas aux gens que tu fais ça.
(b) *fasses

When dire means "affirm" , however, it falls into class (B), if the complement is in the past. Both

(59a) Je ne dis pas que tu as fait ça.

'I affirm something, but not that you did that'

and

(59b) Je ne dis pas que tu aies fait ça.

'I do not affirm (but treat as hypothetical) your having done that'

are possible when dire means "affirm". In this case, in fact, there is a possible contrast which is central to the meaning of the subjunctive. We will return to this contrast below.

In the present tense, dire appears to fall together with soutenir in that, where the subjunctive can follow, it is in the sense of willing the action expressed in the complement:

(60) Je ne dis pas que tu fasses ça.

'I'm not telling you to do that'.

(61) Je ne soutiens pas qu'il vienne.

'I don't support his coming'.

But the indicative follows for the sense of affirming:

(62) Je ne dis pas que tu fais ça.

'I don't say you do that'.

(63) Je ne soutiens pas qu'il vient.

'I don't support the claim that he's coming'.

These, then, are cases where the regular class (B) usage of the indicative-subjunctive distinction is by-passed in favour of differentiation the willing from the affirmation sense of the governing verbs.

Another seemingly isolated use of the indicative-subjunctive contrast distinguishes non-neg.-raised from neg.-raised sentences:

(64a) Je ne pense / prévois / prétends / présume pas qu'il vient; j'en suis sûr.
(b)*vienne

(65a) Je ne soutiens / sous-entends pas qu'il est honnête; je le dis clairement.
(b)*soit

Versus:

(66) Je ne pense / prévois / prétends / présume pas qu'il vienne.

(67) Je ne soutiens / sous-entends pas qu'il soit honnête.

But we shall see that this distinction is not isolated, but rather a realization of the central meaning contrast which is possible between the indicative and the subjunctive.

Class (C) predicates are those which take the subjunctive in the complement if the sentence is imperative, but not if it is affirmative.

The semantic category typical of class (C) are verbs of hypothesizing, e.g.:

(68) Imaginons que Paul soit là.
Supposons
Admettons

It is interesting that supposer, which is perhaps the par-excellence example of this class, has a meaning closer to 'think, believe' than to 'postulate' when it is non-imperative (and thus does not take the subjunctive:

(69a) Je suppose que Paul est parti.).
(b)*soit

Many of the verbs in class (C) can have the meaning 'act as if', and in this case the indicative replaces the subjunctive:

(70a) Imaginez que Paul est parti, et ne vous préoccupez pas de Louise non plus.
Supposez ??soit
Admettez

The following common verbs are in class (C): that is, they take the subjunctive when telling the interlocutor to entertain an hypothesis: s'imaginer, se figurer, admettre, assumer(only in their hypothetical senses), postuler, estimer, supposer, imaginer, conjecturer, présumer.

II. The non-lexically governed subjunctive:

The most interesting use of the subjunctive remaining in present-day French is not linked, I will argue, to a verb class, and it is

to this usage that we will try to relate those we have associated with classes of predicates. This is the subjunctive which contrasts with the indicative in relative clauses contained in NP's interpretable as non-referential. (The term [-referential] is due to Givón, 1973.) It is the (underlying or surface) relative clause which permits a non-referential interpretation of the NP as a whole: naming a class ordinarily supposes its existence. It is the modifier incorporated in the clause which makes it possible to interpret the sub-class designated by the NP as a whole as non-referential. McCawley (1974) proposes that all non-referential complements come from underlying embedded clauses. Perhaps we should claim more specifically that they come from underlying clauses that in some languages can come to the surface with subjunctive verbs.

Dean (1968) argues that analyses of NP's should use the feature [-specific] rather than [-exist], the latter apparently being equivalent to [-referential]. But we shall see below that the interaction of the use of definite vs. indefinite articles and the indicative-subjunctive distinction in French suggests that both these features are necessary to describe possible NP's.

The classic examples of this indicative-subjunctive contrast give the impression that it is linked to a (surface) verb class, whose par-excellence members would be verbs of willing such as <u>chercher</u> and <u>vouloir</u>:

(72a) Je <u>cherche</u> une secrétaire qui <u>est</u> efficace.
(b) <u>soit</u>

(72a) Je <u>veux</u> une femme qui <u>est</u> belle
(b) <u>soit</u>

In the indicative sentences (a), the speaker already knows the secretary or woman in question. In the subjunctive sentences (b), the secretary or woman is hypothetical.

But it is easy to show the impossibility of listing a surface verb class which induces this indicative-subjunctive contrast. Sentences like:

(73) "Il est quand même possible d'obtenir pour chacune des années en cause (1931, 1941, 1951 et 1961) des taux de bilinguisme qui soient comparables" (Charbonneau, Hubert, et Robert Maheu, Les aspects démographiques de la question linguistique, 1973, p. 31)

and

(74) J'aimerais trouver une solution qui soit valable.

(75) Mangez des pommes qui soient mûres (Gross, to appear).

(76) Faites quelque chose qui soit efficace.

(77) "Le moyen le plus sûr d'accréditer une opinion. . . est d'inventer quelques phrases que tous les sots puissent répéter" (Imbs, 1953, p. 38)

(78) "Une pièce qui ait un commencement, un milieu et une fin, quelque chose de comparable à la belle ordonnance classique, c'est dans les hymnes védiques une rare exception" (Ibid., p. 39).

(79) "L'on n'a guère jusqu'à présent un chef-d'oeuvre d'esprit qui soit l'ouvrage de plusieurs" (Ibid., p. 43).

(80) "Je n'ai point encore rencontré d'homme qui n'eût été trompé dans ses rêves de félicité" (Ibid., p.43).

(81) "Quelle goutte de sang répandue qui n'ait servi à la cause commune? (Ibid., p. 44).

begin to give some idea of the semantic variety of surface predicates which would have to be listed as taking the subjunctive in an analysis which conditions this kind of subjunctive on the presence of specific verbs. The typicality of sentences such as (71) and (72) might lead us to predict that historical change may one day suppress the subjunctive after verbs other than chercher, vouloir, and other specific verbs of will. But sentences (73) - (81) show that this use of the subjunctive is not yet lexicalized.

What this suggests is that the subjunctive is possible in any relative clause embedded in a [-referential] NP. Contrast

(82a) Mangez des pommes qui soient mûres.
(b) *les

with

(83a) Mangez les pommes qui sont mûres.
(b) des

In sentence (82b) it is the [+referential] nature of the NP, marked by the definite article les, which is incompatible with the subjunctive. Les, in presupposing the existence of a class of ripe apples, makes the NP [+referential]. In sentence (83), the indicative is compatible with $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{referential}\\+\text{specific}\end{bmatrix}$ (83a), and $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{referential}\\-\text{specific}\end{bmatrix}$ (83b). Des, in combination with the indicative, ia interpreted as $\begin{bmatrix}+\text{referential}\\-\text{specific}\end{bmatrix}$.

Notice that what we are calling [-referential] is not "real" vs. "unreal". The latter distinction, as we shall see, comes much closer to describing a contrast possible between the present indicative and the conditional. The speaker takes no position on the existence or non-existence of the NP sub-class designated by the relative clause containing the subjunctive.

Just as the subjunctive in question here is not lexically conditioned, it is not syntactically conditioned either, in the sense that sentences containing it may be affirmative, negative, interrogative, or imperative:

(84) Je mangerai des pommes qui soient mûres.

(85) Il ne mangera pas des pommes qui soient vertes.

(86) Mangeras-tu des pommes qui soient mûres?

(87) Mangez des pommes qui soient mûres.

However, this subjunctive is syntactically constrained for semantic reasons. It cannot follow just any verb form:

(88a) *Il mangeait des pommes qui soient mûres.
* a mangé (b) fussent
* mange

(cf. 89a: Il réclamait que les pommes soient mûres.
(b) fussent (stilted but possible)

The present or past indicative (unlike the imperative or the future, for ex.) make the interpretation of des pommes as a [-referential] NP impossible. The NP automatically becomes [+referential] in the presence of these forms and thus incompatible with the subjunctive.

III. The meaning of the subjunctive:

An issue of interest is the relation between the [-referential] nature of NP's in which relative clauses containing this subjunctive are embedded and the complements of class (B). We saw that class (B) predicates can take both the indicative and the subjunctive, and that these two modes can contrast in meaning. What is the central semantic difference between indicative and subjunctive complements in this class? If we return to the example of dire:

(59a) Je ne dis pas que tu as fait ça.
(b) aies

we see that in the subjunctive, the embedded proposition is treated as a hypothetical state of affairs. The speaker can use the subjunctive here to claim not to know whether the complement is true. Consider

(90a) Ça ne prouve pas que Jean est le coupable.
(b) soit

Here the indicative can mean that the speaker knows that Jean is guilty. (What counts is that it isn't proven.) The subjunctive can mean that the speaker doesn't know whether Jean is guilty. An analogous contrast is possible with the predicate signifier:

(91a) Cela ne signifie pas que Jean a fait cela.
(b) ait

The indicative can mean that the speaker assumes that Jean has done the deed in question; the subjunctive that the speaker doesn't know whether he has done it or not.

The indicative-subjunctive meaning distinction has become slippery in Modern French where it is still possible, and not all speakers can assign contrasting meanings to all indicative-subjunctive pairs. In the case of many class (B) predicates, they may feel that the indicative and the subjunctive are in free or stylistic variation, a situation which suggests that the distinction is dying. But where a clear, unified distinction between indicative and subjunctive complements of class (B) predicates is possible, it appears that the subjunctive treats the complement proposition as hypothetical, whether its truth value is known or not, implies that other possibilities exist, or creates a possible world in which the truth value of the complement proposition is not at issue. Where there is

contrast, the indicative treats the complement as an affirmation. We saw that class (C) predicates also introduce hypotheses. There, an indicative-subjunctive distinction is possible when the verb can have the sense 'act as if'. The subjunctive treats the complement as an hypothesis; the indicative treats it as a fact.

Leaving class (A), the apparently meaningless subjunctive, aside for the moment, can the use of the subjunctive with class (B) and (C) predicates be semantically associated with that in relative clauses? It seems to me that it can: The NP in which the relative clause is embedded is [-referential] and thus has a hypothetical status, like the complements of class (B) verbs (when the subjunctive is used in negative and interrogative sentences), and like the subjunctive complements of class (C) verbs in the imperative. It may then be enough to say that the central meaning contrast that is possible between the indicative and the subjunctive can be expressed as [±real] ,[-real] meaning hypothetical.

In looking for exception to such a generalization, we might think of the verbs mentioned above for which the subjunctive-indicative distinction marked the difference between neg.-raising and negation of the main verb itself (sentences 64-67 above). But it is still the case that, in the subjunctive sentences (66) and (67), the subordinate clause is treated as an hypothesis (one which the speaker is refusing to confirm). In the indicative sentences (64) and (65), the subordinate clause is precisely not a hypothesis but an affirmation.

On pp. 3-4 and 6 we discuss apparently isolated lexical distinction expressed by the indicative-subjunctive contrast: the indicative for affirmation, the subjunctive for suggesting a course of action. But the latter meaning in contrast to affirmation, is closely related to hypothesizing.

IV. Loss of the subjunctive:

Let us return to class (A). After the verbs of this class, the subjunctive follows regardless of the syntactic nature of the sentence or the semantic nature of the complement (with idiosyncratic exceptions). We have seen that this class is semantically heterogeneous. What seems to be atypical of class (A) are the predicates of affirmation, which characterize class (B), and the predicates of hypothesizing, which characterize class (C). Note that neither of these latter classes is factive. It is the factive sub-class of (A) which is most in conflict with the meaning of the subjunctive, insofar as a unified meaning can be found. Factive predicates presuppose the truth of the complement sentence. This leaves no room for the hypothetical nature characteristic of subjunctive complements which can contrast with indicative ones. The fact that there are some factive verbs in (A), by far the largest class of subjunctive-inducing predicates, suggests that the loss of the subjunctive passes through a stage where it becomes exclusively lexically triggered and thus meaningless. We might predict that the other non-factive verbs involved (classes B and C) may join class (A), while the subjunctives of relative clauses should die by merger in favour of the indicative, via free or stylistic variation. Here there is no lexical class to assimilate to. Alternatively, subjunctive relative clauses may pass through a stage of being triggered only by certain verbs (e.g., chercher and vouloir), as was suggested above. This reduction to very limited lexical triggering seems to be what has happened in English (e.g. I wish I were...), although, as was mentioned above, the predicates which trigger the English subjunctive at least have non-factivity in common.[2]

Class (A), then, can be seen to represent one possible stage in the loss of the subjunctive: loss of meaning. Class (B) seems to represent a phase in which a semantic difference between the indicative and the subjunctive is giving way to stylistic variation. Thus the hesitation and variation among speakers as to what, if any, meaning difference depends on the choice between indicative and subjunctive after class (B) predicates. Class (C) shows an interdependent combination of lexical and syntactic conditioning (although a contrast between the subjunctive and the indicative is possible where the verb can mean 'act as if'. Relative clauses seem at the moment to be losing the subjunctive via form neutralization to the indicative. Some speakers think they would be unlikely to use the subjunctive in sentences like (71-87). But this is still the most meaningful subjunctive in French, since it is not lexically conditioned. Insofar as the other subjunctives are still distinctive, their meaning can be associated with the [-referential] distinction in relatives.

V. Replacement of the subjunctive:

Finally, what syntactic devices can replace the subjunctive, and appear to be doing so in French? Reduction of clauses to adjective or infinitive form eliminated certain potential subjunctives. The adjective construction is then ambiguoud between the meaning of an indicative and a subjunctive clause:

(72a) Je veux une femme qui $\frac{\text{est}}{\text{soit}}$ belle. (92) Je veux une belle femme.

In the resulting neutral sentence (92), it is not clear whether the NP complement is [-referential] or [+specific], (implying [+referential]).

After certain predicates, the infinitive construction is ambiguous between the meaning that could be expressed by the subjunctive (if there were no rule obligatorily deleting a repeated subject after such predicates) and another sense:

(93)*J'ai peur que j'aille trop vite.

'I'm afraid I am going too fast', 'I'm afraid I will go too fast'

(94) J'ai peur d'aller trop vite.

'I'm afraid to go too fast'

⟶ (95) J'ai peur d'aller trpp vite.

After certain other predicates, the reduction-to-infinitive rule is not obligatory, but is stylistically preferred. This again leads to the neutralization of any possible contrast between the indicative and the subjunctive:

(96a) Je ne pense pas que je fais ça. (b) fasse ⟶ (97) Je ne pense pas faire ça.

The conditional can replace the subjunctive in relative clauses:

(98) Je cherche une secrétaire qui { saurait / serait } taper à la machine / efficace.

But there is a slight difference in meaning between this sentence and its subjunctive-containing counterpart. The distinctive subjunctive, as was mentioned above, takes no position on the truth value of the complement sentence, or in the case of relative clauses, the existence of the subclass of NP's in question. The conditional, on the other hand, implies uncertainty, or even doubt, about the truth or existence of the complement. Thus it would be bizarre to say

(99a)?Je cherche une secrétaire qui { saurait taper à la machine / serait efficace. }

et je suis sûr que j'en trouverai une,

but its subjunctive counterpart would be normal:

(99b) Je cherche une secrétaire qui { sache / soit } taper à la machine / efficace ,

et je suis sûr que j'en trouverai une,

In spite of this at least potential meaning difference, the conditional can alternate with and replace the subjunctive. As Imbs (1953, p. 45) notes, this happens after dire and rapporter where the speaker treats someone else's affirmation as hypothetical:

(100) "On { dit / rapporte } qu'il aurait caché son trésor sous un des degrés de la tour dite de Mandrin."

Imbs (1960, pp. 63-4) cites other examples from the written language:

(101) "L'assemblée décidait que l'échafaud serait dressé de nouveau sur la place de la Révolution."

(102) "Elle obtint de lui qu'ils quitteraient le pays."

vs.

(103) "Sans doute, avais-je obtenu que le général Catroux fût présent à la négociation."

vs.

(104) "Il lvenait d'obtenir d'un roi allié que son armée ne serait pas pour toujours mise au repos, (et) des Anglais qu'ils n'évacuassent pas Salonique." (An informant found this sentence strange, apparently because of the mixtures of styles induced by putting a conditional present and an imperfect subjunctive as parallel complements in the same sentence. But this parallelism indicates that the writer gives the two forms the same status. The difference between the conditional and the subjunctive which differentiates the status of (99a) from that of (99b) has been neutralized here.)

Insofar as the subjunctive form is becoming rarer in negative and interrogative sentences after class (B) predicates and in relative clauses, we have seen that the present indicative may replace it:[3]

(91b) Cela ne signifie pas que Jean ait fait cela.
⟶ (A) a

(82a) Mangez des pommes qui soient mûres.
⟶ (83b) sont

This replacement neutralizes the meaning distinction between the indicative and the subjunctive. (91a) can now mean that the speaker takes no position on the truth value of the complement. In (83b), the speaker does not necessarily know whether the NP complement exists. Thus the potentially distinctive subjunctive of class (B) predicates and relative clauses is today felt to be an pptional nuance.

Certain verbs of class (A) which lend themselves to complements referring to the future (e.g. douter) can take the future (indicative) under some conditions.[4] For example, this appears to be possible in negative and interrogative sentences:

(105a) Je ne doute pas que Paul sera là.

(105b) Doutes-tu que Paul sera là?

In class (B), particularly in questions, there are signs of replacement of the subjunctive by the present or future indicative, rather than mere alternation. For some of these predicates, the present or future, depending on the meaning, is preferable to or more normal than the subjunctive in questions; for others, the subjunctive is unacceptable:

(106a) Cela signifie-t-il que Paul sera là?
(b) est
(c) ?soit

(107a) Est-ce que tu prétends / présumes qu'il viendra?
(b) vient?
(c) * vienne?

Where the present subjunctive is impossible, its systematic ambiguity between a present and a future interpretation is thus eliminated in favour of a time contrast, as (107a)-(107b) show.

Hahn (1953) claims that the Indo-European subjunctive originated as a future, and that in early Latin and early Greek, the future and the subjunctive alternated. In Latin, the present subjunctive even replaced the future indicative in certain kinds of clauses. She also calls attention (p. 139) to the change in meaning of English will from the kind of verb that is followed by the subjunctive to the future modal. The replacement of the subjunctive by the future in Modern French appears to be one end of a process that can go in either direction.

If the subjunctive is used at all in class (B) questions, it is generally with a future meaning and a nuance of doubt (i.e., the presupposition that a yes answer is unlikely):

(108) Pensez-vous qu'il vienne?
Prévois-tu
Promets-tu } = viendra

'Do you think he will come? (I don't.)'
foresee
promise

As Givón (1973, p. 109) points out, the semantic modality "future" has a [-certain] specification in common with negative and non-factive predicates. Predicates with this uncertainty specification are among those which trigger the subjunctive in many languages. The future, like the conditional, can replace the subjunctive without loss of the [-certain] meaning feature specification associated with the subjunctive.

Dean (1968) discusses the use of the future in English clauses containing [-specific] NP's. [-referential] NP's are of course a sub-category of [-specific] NP's.

For verbs of class (B), when the main clause contains a past tense, and for those of class (C) when the complement is in the past, spoken French tends to avoid the imperfect subjunctive the sequence of tense rules would require. The imperfect indicative, rather than the present subjunctive, replaces the imperfect subjunctive in such cases:

(109a) Il n'a pas estimé que le travail *soit bien fait.
(b) ?fût
(c) était

(110a) Il ne pensait pas que Luc *ait raison
(b) ?eût
(c) avait

(111a) Imagine / Suppose / Admets que Luc *fusse ça quand tu es entré dans la pièce.
(b) ?fit
(c) faisait

Thus, although the subjunctive is normally possible after class (B) predicates in negative sentences and class (C) verbs in imperatives, the sequence of tense rules are one more force allowing it to be replaced by the indicative. In this respect class (B) and (C) contrast with class (A), where the present subjunctive replaces the imperfect subjunctive:

(112a) Les ouvriers revendiquaient que les contremaîtres *étaient chassés.
(b) ?fussent
(c) soient

(113a) Je voulais / J'ai demandé / J'exigeais / Je craignais / J'ai accepté que Luc *partait / ?partît / parte

VI. Conclusion

In this paper we have examined three types of predicates in French which induce their complement verbs to take the subjunctive form under certain conditions. We have also seen that relative clauses can exhibit a meaningful indicative-subjunctive distinction which is not lexically conditioned. We have found that the [±referential] difference expressed by this ppposition is very similar to the "fact" or "affirmation" vs. "hypothesis" distinction which characterizes the complements of the predicates which allow an indicative-subjunctive contrast. We have therefore claimed that the indicative-subjunctive meaning distinction, where it exists, can be summarized as [±real] .

In the last two sections, we have mentioned ways in which the French subjunctive has lost meaning, ways in which it is apparently doing so now, and possible avenues of further loss in the future. We have also looked at syntactic devices which alternate with and replace the subjunctive, and at the meaning changes entailed by certain of these replacements.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Not entirely true, Cf. annex to this paper by Lorraine Labine.

[2]One possible way of predicting the course of historic change may be to see into what kinds of verb forms the different classes of French subjunctives translate in English. A preliminary examination indicates that class (A) favours translation by the modal should. The contrasts of classes (B), (C), and relative clauses tends to neutralize into indicative.

[3]Note that this neutralization to the indicative parallels the way sentences of these classes translate into English.

[4]For a more complete discussion of this important ongoing change see annex to this paper by Lorraine Labine.

Annex 1

The subjunctive in decline: the case of French K. Connors-Pupier

(1) Ca va que Pierre vienne.

(2) Il arrive que Pierre vienne.

(3) Ca convient à Luc que Jean parte.

(4) Je doute qu'il parte.
veux
demande
exige

(5) J'insiste pour qu'il parte.

(6) Il déplaît à Luc que je parte
Ca

(7) Il est curieux que Luc parte.
C'

(8) Il est faux que Luc parte.
soit parti.

(9) Ca se fait qu'on parte sans avertir.

(10) Il peut se faire qu'il vienne.
Ca

(11) Ca plaît à Jean que Luc vienne.

(12) Il vaut mieux que tu t'en ailles.
J'accepte
J'aime mieux

(13) J'attends que tu viennes.

(14) J'autorise ça, que Luc parte.

(15) Je choisis que Luc parte.

(16) Je crains qu'il vienne.

(17) Je désire qu'il parte.

(18) J'entends que vous soyez tous à la réunion.

(19) J'évite qu'il y ait des rencontres imprévues.

(20) Je ferai en sorte que Luc soit absent quand je verrai sa femme.

(21) Il a fait exprès que je sois là.

(22) Il mérite qu'on le pende.

(23) J'ai obtenu qu'on parte immédiatement.

(24) Je prie le Seigneur qu'il fasse pousser les récoltes.

(25) Je regrette que vous soyez là.

(26) On revendique que le patron sorte de son bureau.

(27) Je souhaite que vous partiez bien vite.

(28) Je supplie les autorités qu'elles fassent leur devoir.

(29) Je supporte mal qu'il me fasse cocu.
assez bien qu'elle parte avec un autre.
très

(30) Je tâcherai qu'il s'en aille au plus vite.

(31) Je tolère que mon fils soit un imbécile mais pas qu'il reste puceau.

(32) Je vois mal que vous soyez embauché et que vous refusiez de payer la cotisation syndicale.

(33) J'ai avantage à ce qu'il ne soit pas élu.
intérêt

(34) On s'attend à ce que vous veniez.

(35) Il faut que vous veniez.

(36) Fais attention qu'il soit là!

(37) Prends garde qu'il ne vienne!

(38) Regarde à ce que tout soit prêt!

(39) Renonce à ce que tout le monde soit à ton service!

(40) Je tiens à ce que vous soyez tous présents.

(41) J'ai besoin qu'elle vienne.
envie
hâte
honte
la chance

(42) J'enrage qu'il soit là.

(43) Je me moque qu'il s'en aille sans payer.
fous

(44) Je me méfie qu'il fasse encore des histoires.

Annexe 2

Alternances possibles du subjonctif en Français — Lorraine Labine

Pour faire suite à l'article précédent, une recherche a été entreprise portant spécifiquement sur un des points discutés dans cet article. Il s'agit de l'alternance possible du subjonctif avec un autre temps soit le présent soit le futur. En effet, le subjonctif peut être remplacé par le futur ou le présent. Cependant, ce n'est pas ainsi dans tous les cas; il y a certains verbes entre autres qui exigent le subjonctif et qui n'auront aucun sens si on emploie un autre temps. C'est le cas des verbes d'ordre et de souhait:

Je désire qu'il vienne.
*Je désire qu'il vient.
*Je désire qu'il viendra.

Le remplacement du subjonctif peut être la marque d'une plus grande précision: le subjonctif présent a deux valeurs de temps soit le présent et le futur. Quand on dit une phrase en employant un subjonctif, c'est le contexte qui nous renseigne sur le temps de l'action.

Je ne pense pas qu'il vienne.

Cette phrase peut exprimer un présent aussi bien qu'un futur. Si on remplace le subjonctif par un futur, ce qui est possible pour cette phrase, on n'aura plus de doute sur le temps de l'action:

Je ne pense pas qu'il viendra.

Ce genre de phrase a tendance à être de plus en plus employé en français. Par contre, avec certains verbes, on ne peut admettre un futur dans la proposition qui suit. Une classification de ces verbes reste une chose à faire.

L'alternance possible du présent et du subjonctif est moins courante, et dans quelques cas, il semble y avoir une différence de sens.

Je suis d'accord que Jean vienne mais restez dans le salon.

Je suis d'accord que Jean vient mais cessez de m'en parler.

Avec l'emploi du subjonctif, la phrase est interprétée comme: "Jean peut venir". Avec l'emploi du présent, cette même phrase est interprétée cette fois comme: "C'est vrai que Jean vient".

De même il y a les exemples citées dans l'article précédent concernant l'alternance du subjonctif et du présent.

Le fait important est que le cas du présent est différent de celui du futur et une étude plus approfondie nous permettrait peut-être d'en arriver à certaines conclusions intéressantes.

REFERENCES

Dean, Janet. "Nonspecific noun phrases in English". Report No. NSF-20 to National Science Foundation (Mathematical Linguistics and Automatic Translation). Computation Laboratory of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968.

Givon, Talmy. "Opacity and reference in language: an inquiry into the role of modalities", in John P. Kimball (ed.), Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 2. New York (Seminar Press), 1973. Pp.95-122.

Gross, Maurice. Méthodes en syntaxe. Université de Paris-Vincennes et Laboratoire d'Automatique Documentaire et Linguistique. To appear.

Hahn, Adelaide. Subjunctive and optative: their origin as futures. American Philological Association. New York, 1953.

Imbs, Paul. Le subjonctif en français moderne. Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de Strasbourg, 1953.

_____. L'emploi des temps verbaux en français moderne. Paris, (Klincksieck), 1960.

Kiparsky, Paul and Carol Kiparsky. "Fact", in Manfred Bierwisch and Karl Erich Heidolph (eds), Progress in Linguistics. The Hague (Mouton), 1970. Pp. 143-73.

McCawley, James D. "On identifying the remains of deceased clauses". Indiana University Linguistics Club, 1974.